Creativity, identity, and representation

Towards a socio-cultural theory of creative identity

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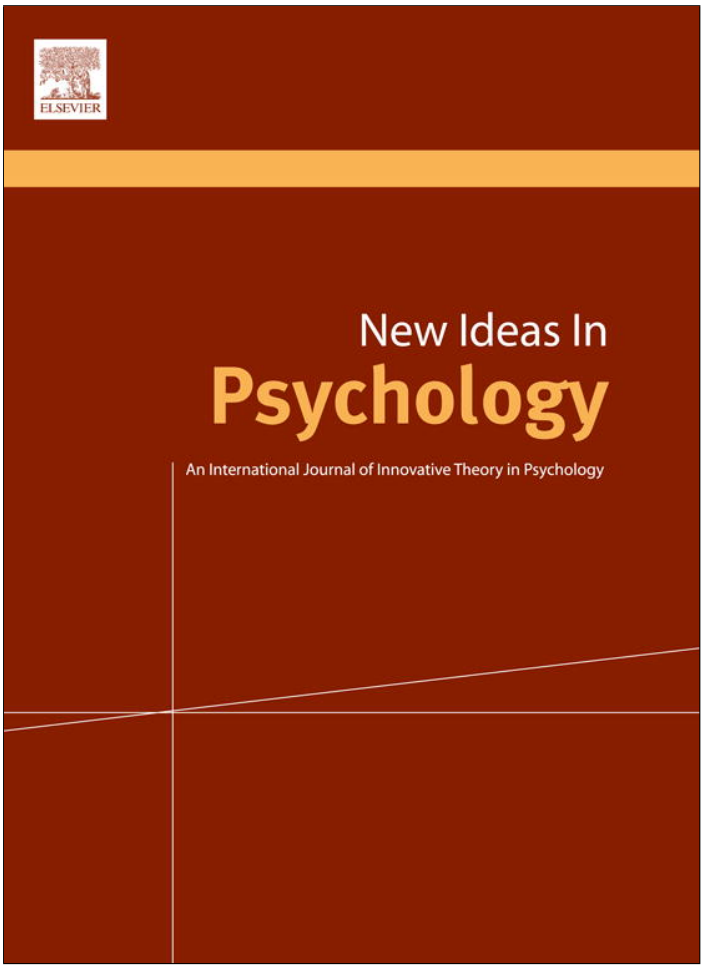

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Creativity, identity, and representation: Towards a socio-cultural theory of creative identity

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A B S T R A C T

The present article argues for the need to incorporate a theory of identity in the study of creativity and develops a socio-cultural framework of creative identity drawing inspiration from work on social representations. Creative identities are considered representational projects emerging in the interaction between self (the creator), multiple others (different audiences), and notions of creativity informed by societal discourses. An important temporal dimension is added to this model making the self–other–object triad expand into time and highlighting the changing nature of our representations of creativity and creative people. A basic typology of creative identities is proposed and illustrated with examples ranging from the work of artists and TV show hosts to everyday contexts such as the school and ordinary practices like craft activities. Promoted, denied and problematic identities are defined and contrasted in order to gain a better understanding of how identity – a simultaneously individual and collective project – fosters or, on the contrary, can impede creative work. In the end, a more comprehensive vision of creative identities as social, dynamic, contextual, multiple and mediated is formulated and arguments offered for why this perspective is important for both theory and practice.

"The psychologists' problem is that of creative personality" – a key part of Guilford's APA presidential address to the community of psychologists more than six decades ago (Guilford, 1950, p. 444). Lamenting the scarcity of research in this area, and arguing for the importance of creativity in education and for society at large, Guilford's call for a more systematic investigation of the phenomenon was not left unheard. Indeed, the decades that followed showed a substantial increase in creativity studies (Runco, 2004) while keeping relatively faithful to this initial formulation of creativity as a system of personality traits and cognitive abilities. In other words, the paradigmatic model for studying creativity has, by and large, revolved around the *creative person* and, 'within' the person, a strong emphasis placed on cognition and individual attributes (Amabile, 1996; Glăveanu, 2010a). On the one hand, this conceptualisation was very fruitful for psychological research, emphasising measurement and facilitating both correlational and experimental studies of creativity (Barron & Harrington, 1981; Finke, Ward, & Smith, 1992). On the other hand, a person-centric formulation disconnects the creator from his/her wider environment. This critique, gaining prominence after the 1980s (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988; Montuori & Purser, 1995), led to systemic approaches that, without denying the creative person, consider it always in relation to a context (something often acknowledged by research done in applied fields such as education or organisations). For these researchers, reducing creativity to personality is indeed a 'psychologist's problem', one that is still looking for (creative) theoretical and methodological solutions.

This paper aims to advance one possible way of moving past the intrinsic individualism specific for the mainstream psychology of creativity by trying to (re)conceptualise the

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notion of creative identity and exemplify when, how and with what consequences people build identities as 'creators'. It proposes a conception of identity that draws largely on the theory of social representations (Moscovici, 1981, 1984) and articulates a socio-cultural model of creative identities. From this perspective, being a 'creator' involves identity work and identity itself is fundamentally a social category. The creative person therefore, far from existing as an isolated unit, is a *social actor* able to co-construct his or her own sense of creative value in communication with others and in relation to societal discourses about what creativity is. In the end, there is creativity in identity construction just as there is identity construction in the most mundane forms of creative expression. Most importantly, identities conducive for creative performance are not just 'given' but built over time in interactions that are often marked by struggles and acts of resistance. We will exemplify here some of these processes and suggest a basic typology of creative identities in the second part of the article. It is our hope that such an attempt will stimulate further elaborations and thus begin to expose the big (identity) elephant sitting comfortably in the room of creativity research.

1. Linking creativity and identity: a work in progress

The issue of identity has received until now, with a few exceptions, surprisingly little attention from creativity researchers. This can be due to the fact that identities are less stable than personality traits and, by comparison to cognitive abilities, are considered to be a 'background' element in creative production. Current studies in this area fall generally into three main categories. First, there are researches that consider identity in general terms and try to examine the correlation between identity states and creative production with the aim of predicting when people are prone to be more or less creative depending on their identity structure (Barbot, 2008; Cheng, Sanchez-Burks, & Lee, 2008; Dollinger, Dollinger, & Centeno, 2005; Šramová & Fichnová, 2008). Other studies consider creative identity specifically and focus on either its antecedents (Farmer, Tierney, & Kung-Mcintyre, 2003) or consequences (Hirst, van Dick, & van Knippenberg, 2009; Jaussi, Randel, & Dionne, 2007). Lastly, researchers try also to manipulate social identity experimentally in order to discover causal links between group norms and creativity in particular situations (Adarves-Yorno, Postmes, & Haslam, 2006, 2007). Overall, this type of work into creativity and identity starts from the (often implicit) assumption that creative identity relates to creative performance. But how strong is this link?

In the literature, the relation between creativity beliefs about the self and performance is studied under 'creative self-efficacy'. This line of research has known a marked expansion in the last decade (see Beghetto, 2006; Jaussi et al., 2007; Tierney & Farmer, 2002). Generally understood as a person's belief that he or she can be creative in performing a certain work, creative self-efficacy relates to creative identity but should *not* be treated as synonymous. Work by Jaussi et al. (2007) points for instance to the fact that creative personal identity is able to explain variance in creative performance above and beyond creative self-efficacy. In this type of research, creative personal identity is connected to how much creativity is valued and treated as important by the individual. Although both self-efficacy and identity contribute to a more general creative self factor, the latter underpins the former and may enhance its effects in specific tasks or situations (Karwowski, 2012). On the whole, creative identity is studied as a moderating or mediating variable positioned at the interface between individual or social factors and creative performance (Wand & Zhu, 2011; Wang & Cheng, 2010). A legitimate question that arises is why, unlike self-efficacy, identity has seldom been considered to shape creative behaviour directly.

To answer this question we need to review an older line of research concerning the connection between identity and role performance (Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Burke and Reitzes argued there is a strong link between the two only when they share the same frame of reference or the same meanings. This important emphasis on the symbolic 'content' of one's identity comes to the fore in other types of research as well, e.g. studies of stereotype susceptibility. Shih, Pittinsky, and Ambady (1999) showed in this case that the implicit activation of a social identity has a direct effect on how well a person performs on a task depending on the stereotype associated with that identity (e.g., Asian-American women perform better on a math test when their ethnicity is activated and worse when their gender identity is made salient). What all these studies point to is the fact that, in order to properly unpack the link between identity and behaviour, we need to understand more than how important a certain identity is for the person (here, the identity of being a creative individual). What we need is to study what this identity *means*.

This article proceeds by advancing a perspective that focuses precisely on identity content and brings to the fore its representational nature. Most of the creativity studies mentioned above tend to adopt a quantitative approach and consider (creative) identity as a variable among other variables. They usually conceptualise identity in terms of an individual's self-assessment (judging one's own creativity, evaluating group memberships or other personal attributes, etc.) and thus fail to address core questions such as: what is the exact content of this identity? What are the origins of these beliefs about the self? How is the identity of being a creative person formed, experienced and maintained through constant social interaction and what are its consequences for both self and others? The theoretical model proposed next starts from these interrogations in its effort to build a more comprehensive model of the phenomenon.

2. A theoretical model of creative identity

There are many potential sources to draw from in elaborating a socio-cultural account of human identity and applying it to the case of creative identities. Current literature includes such attempts building on either symbolic interactionism (Petkus, 1996), dialogism (de Peuter, 1998), or Vygotskian perspectives (Hagstrom, 2005). The

theoretical model we propose here is in dialogue with these elaborations. Its direct inspiration however is the *theory of social representations* (SRT) (Marková, 2003; Moscovici, 1984) and its basic mediation triangle represented by two subjects and an object. In essence, this approach suggests that knowledge about an object of representation (in our case, creativity or the creative person) is constructed in the dialogue between social actors (which can be individuals, groups or entire communities).

How is representation associated with identity? Simply put, representations are the very substance of our identities (Duveen & Lloyd, 1990). In agreement with Jovchelovitch (1996, p. 125), "social representations are a network of mediating social meaning which lends texture and material to the construction of identities". As such, from this theoretical standpoint, an identity is composed of a system of representations about oneself developed in relation to other people and their systems of representation. This social element, fundamental for the construction of identity, makes it a very dynamic reality, never fully realised, always in a process of reformulation. At the same time, precisely because social representations themselves gain stability over time (contributing to a symbolic environment that acquires 'reality' for its participants and becomes taken-for-granted; Moscovici, 2000), identities can often be resistant to change, especially when power relations make stronger majorities impose their own representation on certain minorities. However, because SRT understands people as agents in the process of representation, there is room for contestation and debate in the construction of any type of identity or, in other words, there is always a possibility for re-presentation (Howarth, 2002). It is this flexibility that makes creativity a key element in both the construction of knowledge about the world and knowledge about the self.

What does this theory tell us about creative identities? As depicted in Fig. 1, the self adopts a creative identity depending on social interaction with others and in relation to the meaning both self and other give to creativity. Three important observations are required. First, the 'other' in an SRT model is always multiple and a sense of personal identity built through interactions with different people and groups at home, at the workplace, in public spaces, etc. (this is also the reason why identity itself is a heterogeneous construction, capable of 'adapting' to specific social contexts and being influenced by them). Second, the meaning of creativity may be an issue of debate between self and other but it also draws on societal discourses (in Moscovici's, 1988, conception – hegemonic forms of representation, a perspective we adopt here rather than consider discourse as a more general cultural genre) about creativity. In psychology, for instance, these hegemonic views, as argued at the beginning, associate creativity primarily with the individual, the essence of an I-paradigm (Glăveanu, 2010a) not uncommon for lay thinking either. However, there is no absolute hegemony that doesn't leave room for multiplicity and contestation (Marková, 2003; Moscovici, 1984) and it is this potential to draw on different discourses existing in society that makes identity construction a creative endeavour. For instance, although we still tend to glorify the creative individual and are fascinated by the achievements of highly eminent people, a counter-discourse is also available: that of creativity as a collaborative process that takes place mainly in groups (e.g., Sawyer's, 2007 'Group Genius' book). Finally, the depiction below emphasises the fact that all these elements and relations have a temporal dimension that holds the key to understanding (creative) identity as an unfolding phenomenon.

The schematic illustration in Fig. 1 draws direct inspiration from the Toblerone model of representation proposed by Bauer and Gaskell (1999). For these two authors, the basic mediational triangle of subject–subject–object needs to be 'extended' in time and the production of representations understood in the context of a common *project* developed by participants in relation to the object of representation. In the words of the authors, "subjects, object and project form a system of mutual constitution; the third mediating between the other two" (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999,

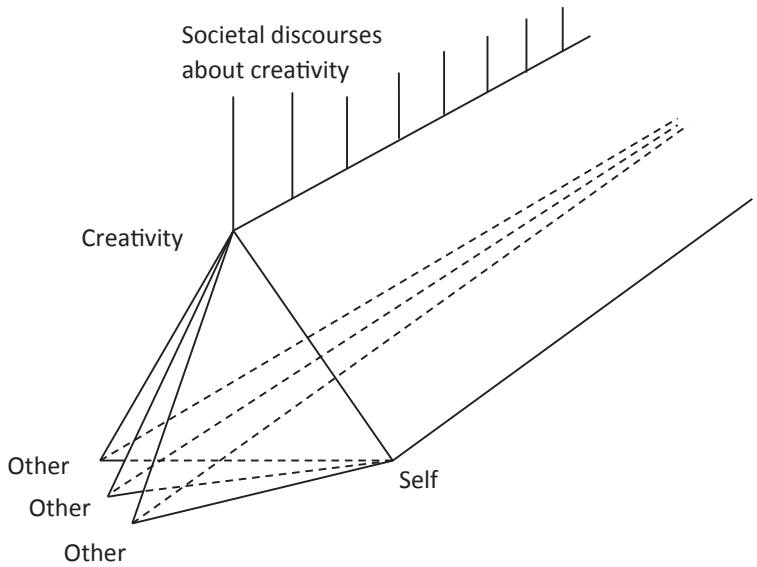

Fig. 1. The creative identity as a representational project.

p. 168). The exact meaning of a project in the context of SRT is still in need of precise definition and Bauer and Gaskell used it in order to make sense of the ways in which members of different communities approach the same "reality" (the same object of representation) while constructing different, sometimes opposing, representations of it. In this context, we are advancing here an understanding of *creative identities as identity projects*, developed by the self in relation to a series of others and with reference to a shared meaning of creativity. Identity is therefore a simultaneously personal and social task and the identity of being a 'creator' is certainly a developing project that requires others to see and relate to the person 'as a creator'.

Before proceeding, it is important to note two things. First, our focus here is on identity understood as a socio-cultural project developed within self–other relations through action and communication and not on identity as a narrative product. Identity projects orient the person, are enacted within a certain context, and, as such, represent dynamic and situated processes. The narrative content or structure of identity cannot be ignored either but a focus on it tends to overemphasise what people say or think about themselves rather than what they actively *do*. Second, and related to the above, we don't mean to imply that creative people are constantly aware of, worry about, and try to advance their creative identity with every action. To begin with, identity doesn't 'exist' only when the person is conscious of it, talks about it to others or acts driven by it. Equally, identity doesn't 'disappear' when the self is unaware of expressing it through actions and interactions; identity is constantly *performed*, and (re)formulated within performance, in the way people react to others, interpret situations, approach them, etc. Taking their own image as creative people to be a personal project is not uncommon for great creators, particularly since the expansion of media and mass communication (one can only think here about the case of Salvador Dali), and this interest in creative identity projects can be extended also to novices (see, for instance, the research by Taylor & Littleton, 2008). However, the project we are referring to here is a much more diffuse reality, a general direction the self takes in relation to his or her creative potential and expression, based also on communication with others. This communication doesn't imply that others explicitly discuss the person's creativity or its outcomes; identity-building interactions have a much wider scope than this and they often take the form of implicit feedback or indirect commentary.

To summarise, a socio-cultural model of creative identity drawing on SRT considers identities to be relational structures emerging out of a work of representation performed by the self and multiple others. As a consequence, a comprehensive study of identity and creativity would require us to look beyond the individual alone and consider the inter-connections between the following elements:

- A *self* that engages in creative or potentially creative forms of activity;
- A series of *others* the self is interacting with and whose perceptions are significant for the way in which the self represents its own creativity;
- A shared understanding of *creativity* that is open to (re) negotiation in self–other relations;
- Societal *discourses* about creativity informing this (re) negotiation of meaning;
- A developmental, temporal *trajectory* of the self–other–creativity triad;
- An *identity project* fostered by the self and accomplished within social encounters.

The particular ways in which these elements relate to each other lead to different types of creative identity and, as follows, a simple typology will be advanced and exemplified. This typology is based on the premise that a creative identity is both acquired and maintained in a social context that can be more or less favourable to its formation. In this sense, we can distinguish between promoted, denied and problematic creative identities, the latter demonstrating how internal contradictions regarding the meaning of creativity play an important part in defining one's identity project.

2.1. Promoted creative identities

This is the case of recognised creators in society (or in different communities) who derive part of their motivation to create from actually maintaining their identity as creators (social recognition has a special role to play in this regard). To illustrate this type, we will draw here from 20 in depth interviews with 25 recognised, 'celebrity' creators in Denmark, working in the fields of art, music, film, design, media and advertising (for details see Tanggaard & Stadil, 2012).

This exploration points to the fact that interviewed creators constantly work to maintain their creative identity and do so by referring to self and other relations and interactions. As the music composer and founder of the famous Danish pop-band Aqua (internationally known for hits such as 'Barbie Girl'), Søren Rasted explains in one of the interviews, "I used to see myself as the 'King of Pop'. Now I certainly recognise the importance of others. One plus one equals four. My co-composer Claus is really a tough guy and in the end, I always realise that he is right and simultaneously, I move to a place where he is actually right". As such, Søren's creative identity is not set at once, but is dynamically changing in a close dialogue with his own conception of self and others and the constant feedback that defines co-action in creative work. Being seen by others as creative is indeed of utmost importance for Søren, and so he strives to be in places and situations where he is actually seen and recognised as such, even if it requires him to move closer to other's ideas of where he should be.

However, relations with others are not always marked by harmony and close ties. For example, the innovation director for the largest (women's) magazine company in Denmark, and famous TV-show host, Pernille Aalund commented in her interview about her intention to keep away from others in her creative process by finding odd and unrecognised places to work in:

> "I love to discover funny places, shops which nobody knows, cities nobody has visited before, movies and

> books which nobody has seen or read. Undiscovered places fascinate me. The worst thing people can say to me is that many other people like this. Of course I enjoy when others like what I have found, but I prefer to be in places nobody knows" (in Tanggaard & Stadil, 2012, p. 157).

Even if it might be an illusion to find undiscovered terrain in a late-modern, globalised city-life as the one Pernille is a part of, it is noteworthy how much emphasis she puts on being unique (and alone) through finding unique places which nobody else cares or knows about. It seems that a promoted creative identity requires her to *distinguish* herself from others, or at least to be a 'first-mover'. This is also in line with societal discourse of creativity portraying highly creative people as unique, different, and revolutionary in their choices (Glăveanu, 2010a; Montuori & Purser, 1995). In her interviews with three creative writers, for instance, Day (2002) emphasised how unique, different and even odd these creators tend to feel by comparison to standards of normal living. Such an identity difference is constructed in relation to others, but not just everybody. The others for Pernille seem to be those people close to her and her work, e.g., the other potential first-movers, her peers, colleagues or competitors from other media companies.

Likewise, in a comparative case study of New Product Design (NPD) consultancies conducted by Gotsi, Andriopoulos, Lewis, and Ingram (2010), the authors show how creative workers often experience inner conflict. On the one hand, 'creatives' desire to see themselves as distinctive in their artistry, passion and self-expression, nurturing an identity that energises their innovative efforts. Yet, daily pressures to meet budgets, deadlines and market demands encourage a more business-like identity that supports firm performance. This requires the workers to manage possible *identity tensions* related to both differentiations and integration strategies, adopting both a creative and a business identity, and to work towards a more synergistic meta-identity as 'practical artists'. By comparison, Pernille also faces serious problems if she keeps being alone in her creative spot. After having discovered the potential unique qualities of certain materials, movies, films, etc., she needs to transform these experiences into products, in this case magazines or TV-shows, which others – in this case customers – appreciate and buy.

Another tension experienced by people with promoted creative identities relates to the complexities and contradictions that creatives face in their professional roles. For instance, the music composer Søren Rasted expresses this most clearly. In his opinion, many other song composers are much better at crafting songs than he is, so he is almost constantly in doubt as to whether he deserves his place in the game (while, as we saw earlier, he used to consider himself the 'King of the Pop'). Doubt and insecurity seem to accompany his creative activity despite being able to live from his work and receive public recognition for his contribution to the success of the pop-band. Even when he has adopted and promoted his own creative identity and certainly lives up to the societal discourse of creativity – being a pop-music composer, being married to the lead singer of the band, being recognised internationally and regularly performing his songs in public – he is in doubt as to whether he can *live up* to his own standards and those of his peers and fans by being the genius composer of popular music time and again (something that Petkus, 1996; refers to as the need to constantly legitimate a creative identity through role performance). At times, professional ideologies may be out of tune with everyday work realities, and thereby generate expectations that are complicated to fulfil and intrinsic tensions that seem to accompany (and even substantiate) a sense of promoted creative identity.

2.2. Denied creative identities

In stark contrast to the cases above, other people are effectively denied a creative identity whenever societal discourses associate creativity with particular personal profiles or other professions (e.g., in art, design, etc.) than that of the self. While previously we were concerned with artists and their promoted creative identities, we will now focus on a more mundane context – the school – as a space of identity construction in relation to everyday conceptions of creativity. Our examples of denied creative identities come from a focus-group interview study with 14 teachers at three different schools in Denmark (for details see Tanggaard, 2011).

One of the interesting themes appearing in these interviews turned out to be the contrast between teachers with promoted creative identities and those who are symbolically denied such identities. In particular, this contrast is expressed in one of the focus-groups in relation to a debate among the teachers as to whether creativity is 'killed' after primary school, or whether it is necessary to be even more creative as a teacher in secondary school in order to enable the more learning-resistant pupils to acquire certain skills and knowledge. In the following discussion it is evident how conceptions of creativity and creative identities do cross swords within the space of the interview and how teachers challenge each other's conceptions:

> Dorrit: I think we are very creative in primary school. It is my impression that all teachers are very creative. And I get really upset when I see how the kids, who were involved in creative learning in primary school, just get this knocked out of them at the secondary level.
>
> Søren: No, no, no, stop now. What I have been saying is that we are very creative at the secondary level. I mean, you really have to be very creative as a teacher to do non-creative teaching.
>
> Annemette: How does that work?
>
> Søren: I really mean it. If you are constantly measured on results, if you need to reach certain goals with rigid constraints, it's really hard to motivate pupils. This needs true creativity. I mean, to see that equations are exciting stuff. In general, it's very, very boring to 99,9% of all human beings. For sure, we are also creative, but we may not address it as clearly as you do in primary school. Well, you might be cleverer than we are. It's not my job to judge that. You are really good at saying things the right way, but…

Dorrit: I'm quite sure that you are much better at doing equations than I am (laughter).

Søren: But I am, – I mean we *are* creative. Maybe it is just more difficult for us to show it.

What the above section illustrates is how the art teacher teaching at primary levels seems used to drawing on a societal discourse of creativity related to the arts and the 'creative' type of education specific for early schooling. She even uses this familiarity with the social representation of creativity to problematise whether creativity can indeed be found at the secondary level. Simultaneously, the math teacher denies the on-going exclusion from the creativity discourse taking place within the interview context and announces that he and his colleagues can be creative even if they are not acquainting the discourse in the same manner as the art teacher. This seems to suggest the fact that denied creative identities can actually be *resisted and transformed* in a quite complex manner in an everyday life conversational reality.

In relation to this negotiation of access to a creative identity, a study done by Søreide (2006) revealed that the narrative identity construction as a creative teacher is clearly connoted with 'positive values', such as willingness to learn new things, being oriented towards new ideas about teaching and learning, seeing possibilities and taking up positively the challenges and joys experienced as part of a teacher's life. In a similar vein, Brinkman (2010) describes how being a creative teacher seems to imply a positive attitude towards change, a good sense of humour, intrinsic motivation, a wide range of interests and persistence. As such, there are reasons to believe that being denied an identity as a creative teacher is also restricting one's access to ways of being in the world typically valued in the educational literature (see also Fasko, 2000/2001). This is not to imply that the openness towards new ideas or persistence and motivation is only possible if you see yourself as a creative teacher, but rather that this identity construction seems to open the door to ways of acting and being in the world related to it.

Of course, being denied creativity by some groups of people (including the 'gatekeepers' of a certain domain; Csikszentmihalyi, 1988) can also stimulate one to create in order to surpass this marginalisation. This tends to be the case of the avant-garde in art. An emblematic example, Van Gogh did not receive recognition for his paintings during his life and yet this did not stop him from continuing his work. However, the creative identity project of artists can be said to already draw on societal images of creativity specific for the arts. Moreover, if we consider the case of Van Gogh, he did receive appreciation at least from a smaller circle, including the support of his brother Theo, and actually his troubled life story offers a vivid testimony of what it means to be confronted with a constant negation of one's creative value and the serious implications this condition has for the psychological wellbeing of the creator.

2.3. Problematic creative identities

Not in all circumstances are creative identities more or less clearly promoted or denied, as exemplified above. There is a vast area of nuances in-between these two poles that we can broadly consider 'problematic' in the sense that creativity as a construct and as an identity poses a problem or difficulty to the person and/or the people around the person. For instance, Karwowski (2010) pointed to the fact that Polish teachers describe only partially overlapping profiles of what a creative student and a good student look like. In other words, the value of creativity, so vividly emphasised in contemporary educational systems, seems to be less welcomed in practical situations where creative students might be less conforming to school norms than teachers want and expect them to be (see also the discussion above about secondary school education). These kinds of examples raise interesting questions such as what are the conditions that lead to creative identities becoming problematic and, most importantly, how do people internalise, enact and respond to such identities?

Here we will answer these questions with the help of *folk art*. Craftsmanship is a very fitting case study for how creators and their audiences can hold an ambiguous position towards creativity. Their ambivalence usually steams from an age-old ideal shared by folk artists to achieve the greatest level of mastery in their work while (and often as a result of) eliminating any traces of personal identity from the end-product. Unlike art, a domain that, as we have seen, fosters and to a certain extent relies on creative identities, craftsmanship is defined mostly by its anonymity. In craft, it is not the individual creator being foregrounded but, on the contrary, the continuity of a tradition takes centre stage. Let us discuss here one such tradition in Romania represented by the decoration of eggs for Easter, a custom with ancient, pre-Christian roots and one that is widely considered to contribute to the cultural identity of Romanians and their folklore (Gorovei, 2001; Irimie, 1969).

In egg decoration, colours and motives are always combined in novel ways and, through this process, artisans invent new patterns based on existing forms (see Glăveanu, 2012; for details). Even the act of duplicating a pattern holds potential for creative expression as 'translating' a motif from one surface to the next requires micro-adjustments and a general capacity to improvise. In the words of one folk artist, "and even if I want to make a certain model, I still have to change something, it's like it is easier to change then to let everything be the same every time" (Livia Balacian in Glăveanu, 2010b, p. 344). Indeed, when describing their work, artisans mention "always inventing something new" (Maria Zinici in Glăveanu, 2010b, p. 344) and "wanting to change things all the time" (Maria Ciocan) in an effort to "bring a personal note" (Larisa Ujică in Glăveanu, 2012, p. 12). Statements such as these suggest an emerging creative identity and yet this type of identity project is countered by a strong tendency to deny innovation and radical departures from tradition in one's own work:

"You can't, no matter what you do, abandon tradition, because you would be making something else [not Easter eggs] and it would be worthless. Even if some things are added, a little flower, a square, anything, it is normal to create but you must always consider tradition" (Rodica Berechea; in Glăveanu, 2010b, p. 346).

Similar to Rodica, most decorators are reluctant, when asked, to present themselves as "creators". At the root of this problematic creative identity stands a deep dichotomy between tradition and creativity and the need to present themselves as keepers of a tradition rather than its creators. "I like to create, to come with something new, but not modify much, eggs need to still be traditional for Ciocăneşti" (Cristina Timu in Glăveanu, 2012, p. 13). As eloquently put by Dănuţ Zimbru, a male decorator from Ciocăneşti village, motifs and work techniques preceded decorators and "you took them as good and you have to keep them" (in Glăveanu, 2012, p. 13). This societal discourse portraying tradition as a fixed entity can be challenged on many accounts (see Negus & Pickering, 2004) and yet it is strongly embedded in the way in which artisans and their 'audiences' (for instance ethnographers and priests; see Glăveanu, 2010b) represent Egg decoration as a cultural practice. In this sense, the identity of the craftsman, at least in this context, seems to be anchored in a discourse of stability and conservation rather than novelty and change.

And yet, just as in the case of denied creative identities, there are clear signs of transformation and resistance towards this problematic recognition of creativity. Some of the decorators, like Ileana Hotopilă and Maria Zinici, take pride in being at the origin of many such "innovations" and customers (an important category of 'others' in this context) constantly demand novelties and Easter eggs that are more aesthetically pleasing. In the words of one ethnographer who commented on these current trends, the craft survives by being "a traditional model that adapts to a very modern market" (in Glăveanu, 2010b, p. 346). Ordinary artisans are not immune to these macro-level transformations and the shifting meaning of what tradition is in relation to creativity and the market. Addressing their inherently problematic identities as 'creators', some of them come to actually question the immovability of tradition: "if we wouldn't create the tradition would be lost. If we wouldn't take tradition forward what would happen to it?" (Larisa Ujică in Glăveanu, 2012, p. 13). In the end, creativity can be recognised as an essential part of tradition and both of them reunited by a new identity project that depicts egg decoration in terms of a necessarily creative act leading to the maintenance through renewal of an old custom.

3. Creativity, identity, and representation: how and why to operate with a socio-cultural model

The aim of this article was threefold. First and foremost its goal was to make us aware of the importance of studying identity as part of understanding creative work independent of its 'status' – from celebrated creations to everyday life contexts such as the school, the home, the market, etc. Second, it wanted to offer a socio-cultural perspective on creative identity drawing mainly on the theory of social representations and, implicitly, on symbolic interactionism and its emphasis on the role of others for constructing a sense of the self. Our notion of identity is therefore in full agreement with the formulation of Hagstrom (2005, p. 19), for whom "identity refers to a representation of oneself that emerges from participation within multiple groups of others across a variety of social contexts". In our proposed framework (see Fig. 1), creative identity is conceptualised as a *representational project* engaging the self in dialogue with multiple others about the meaning of creativity as constructed in societal discourses. This simultaneously personal and social project depends on others not only for its development but also for its success. This is why the third aim of the article was to suggest a very basic distinction between three types of creative identities – promoted, denied and problematic – and exemplify this tentative typology.

Our proposition is not that a person embodies one type of identity alone, since this would go against the very essence of the model advanced here. As we tried to argue, promoted, denied and problematic creative identities are always contextual, being defined in relationships with a series of others: as these relationships change, identities are transformed. This transformation can happen over long periods of time but is also a constant process that defines micro-moments of interaction in which promoted identities can become problematic (we have seen for instance how others' recognition can be a source of inner tension for established creators), denied identities are challenged (for instance in school, by math teachers who confront the creativity discourse of art educators), and problematic identities are dealt with in a creative manner (by folk artists who draw inspiration from the presumed dichotomy between creativity and tradition).

What does a socio-cultural theory of creative identity bring to the existing literature on both self and creativity? We have argued in the introduction that identity in creativity research has rarely been focused on and, when studied, has mainly been understood as a relatively stable and easily quantifiable variable indicating whether the person considers himself or herself as creative in general terms. Much remains unanswered by this type of measurement. It is often not clear for instance how this identity is acquired and maintained. Moreover, the creativity literature lacks a full understanding of how creative abilities are translated into creative behaviour and it is here precisely where a socio-cultural account of creative identity can be most useful. We hypothesise that holding a promoted, denied or problematic creative identity (or, better said, having such an identity made 'salient' in a particular situation) is consequential for the person's intention to engage in creative work and, potentially, its subsequent level of achievement. In line with Burke and Reitzes (1981), we assume that "identities influence the choices made" (p. 91), starting with whether to begin an activity or not. This is how, for instance, a promoted creative identity is likely to support a person in his or her choice to initiate creative work, while a denied creative identity might lead to the opposite. We need to acknowledge however the fact that both identity and behaviour 'reinforce' each other and their connection is situated within a complex system of social relations and meanings that evolves over time, so any views of linear and unidirectional causality need to be replaced by multiple and dynamic relationships.

This contributes to the great *methodological difficulties* associated with the study of identity in its relation to creative behaviour, since it is often the case that identities are

re-constructed or re-formulated based on the perceived effects of action, even during one and the same cycle of activity. Nonetheless, from our theoretical perspective this is a false limitation as the real interest of a creativity researcher should be to study precisely this transformation and not assume a stable or true identity that is 'distorted' by subjective accounts. Reported or constructed narratives embody self representations that are precisely the 'stuff' of identity and the interview method is a privileged way to access them in a contextual manner.

The socio-cultural framework, as such, allows us to build a situated and dynamic account of creative identities. It resonates with current understanding of identity as momentary, fluid and multiple (see Märtsin, 2010) and with cultural conceptions of creativity as a social construct rather than an internal, exclusivist, and reified phenomenon (see Glăveanu, 2010a). There are a number of conclusions to be drawn from this presentation concerning the nature of creative identities:

1. Creative identities are *individual projects of social origin*. This idea goes back to the foundational scholarship of Cooley (1902/1968) and Mead (1934) for whom the self takes shape by internalising the views of others and this process is by no means passive but constructive and… creative. More recently Brinkmann (2008) developed an account of identity as distributed across bodies, persons, practices and society at large. This is very much in tone with considering identity a representation embedded in a dynamic triad of self, other and object (the object of representation can be the notion of creativity, the person of the creator or even the idea of creative identity itself and its myriad expressions).
2. Creative identities are also *dynamic in both time and space*. Their temporality is marked by the fact that self and other, as well as their relationship, change over time. Moreover, the 'object' of representation is also a supple reality that adapts to current conditions of practice (think for instance about the changing image of the creator in the past decades but also historically; see Weiner, 2000). Creative identities are dynamic spatially through their existence as a changing network of interactions with others that expands or contracts depending on how the self manages to negotiate a promoted, denied or problematic type of identity as a creator. In this sense, creative identities are re-presentations that necessarily take into account time and audiences.
3. This makes them also *adaptable and contextual*. From an identity-role perspective, Petkus (1996, p. 195) claimed that "an individual can have more than one identity associated with a given role, and can have more than one role associated with a given identity". These roles (being a teacher, a housewife, a creative in an advertising agency or an Easter egg decorator) are non-exclusive and sometimes overlap (for instance many egg decorators are women who take care of big households and also find time to work and teach younger decorators). A 'creator' identity can be fostered by one or several roles, each of them enacted contextually. This can generate interesting situations in which a promoted creative identity in one context can be denied in another (a math teacher might be considered creative among colleagues but lose this status when talking to art teachers).
4. Deriving from the observation above, there is no creative identity in the singular; creative identities are *always multiple*. Even a person with a promoted creative identity across (most) contexts is not enacting the same self-image in each relationship (or every moment in time, see point 2 above). As considered by William James (1892/1968), an individual has as many social selves as there are persons who recognise him or her. This is equally valid for creative identities. A folk artist for instance holds a different status as a creator when she interacts with ethnographers or museum curators and another when communicating with customers. In the first case, her creative identity is often problematic because it might 'disturb' the conservation of the craft. In the second, her work tends to be associated with art and this fosters a sense of promoted creative identity.
5. Finally, identity is a *mediated structure*. It is mediated not only by social interaction, as mentioned before, but also by societal discourses and ideologies. In the words of Hagstrom (2005, p. 20), depictions of a person as creative "will employ cultural/historical conceptualisations about what it means to be creative". At a societal level, the meaning of creativity is a representational battlefield. This is because there is no single accepted definition of the phenomenon, including in psychology. Paradigms of the genius, the creative person and the collective creator (Glăveanu, 2010a) are struggling for supremacy and inform self–other debates about the meaning of who or what can be considered creative.

The socio-cultural model of creative identity and the typology put forward in this article are in need of further theoretical elaboration and empirical investigation. Their greatest merit rests with the fact that they open up the field of creative identity and consider it in a more comprehensive manner, one that might not be amenable to easy quantifications but nevertheless can guide the construction of novel research designs. New questions emerge based on this framework: who are usually the significant "others" that validate one's creative identity? How is a creative identity enacted in dialogue and everyday interaction? What facilitates the construction of a promoted creative identity and how are denied and problematic identities experienced and negotiated in practice? How does a creative identity change throughout the course of life and what are the consequences of this on one's identity project? How exactly are societal conceptions of creativity 'translated' into resources for creative action? And so on. These questions make sense however only for those researchers who understand that creativity is not primarily (or only) about cognition, aptitudes and personality but most of all about the integration of one's ability and actions into an identity project co-constructed by self and multiple others. For these researchers identity is at the forefront of what it means to create. For the rest, it remains an invisible elephant – or rather a mouse in the corner – one only accidently

stumbles upon when travelling through the dimly lit room of creativity studies.

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